H-France Salon
Volume 16, Issue 5, #3

Surviving the Revolution as a Woman: Strategies of the Directory's *Élégantes*

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Surviving the French Revolution was a two-step process for the women who dominated Parisian society post-Thermidor and during the Directory (1795–1799). First, these women had to successfully navigate the Terror of the Year II. Like male survivors, many relied on their wits, their social and political networks, and/or their relationships with influential men, especially during the dangerous spring and summer of 1794. Time in prison became part of their personal narrative and contributed to their aura of celebrity during the post-Thermidor backlash against Robespierre and his associates. Next, these women had to strategize to establish (or re-establish) themselves among the Directory's social and political elite – simply making it through alive was not enough for them. Gaining or regaining elite status required effective use of their social networks. But these women also relied on their own abilities. Drawing on the skills familiar to elite women under the Old Regime, undergirded by emotional intelligence and savvy, these female survivors navigated the new regime under rapidly shifting circumstances.

The unstable political and social environment post-Thermidor favored women who were appealing and diplomatic, but also bold and adept at negotiating uncertain circumstances. They did not necessarily fear the whiff of scandal that might attach itself to their behavior. As a result, those who flourished under these new conditions were seldom the *crème de la crème* of France's old aristocracy. Many noblewomen who survived the Terror, at home or abroad, rejected integration with the Directory's new elite, and some resisted supporting Napoleon's regime as well. But others embraced the political, social, and economic possibilities the new regime offered. They became chic trendsetters, *élégantes* or *merveilleuses*,[1] who dazzled Parisian society. While implicated in the era's "decadence," these women were also political players whose consumption of luxury goods and looser social mores reflected their desire to help construct a new socio-political order based in part on greater personal liberty and the pursuit of pleasure.[2]

Parisians were living in a new political and social context by 1795 that differed from pre-revolutionary times as well as from the preceding six years. Yet the fashionable women associated with the men who controlled France between 10 Thermidor and 18 Brumaire represented in part a return to an older form of politics, familiar to those acquainted with court

[1] *Élégante* is a more historically accurate term than the oft-used "*merveilleuse*," whose contemporary meaning was much narrower than subsequent connotations.

[2] See Rebecca L. Spang, "The Frivolous French: 'Liberty of Pleasure' and the End of Luxury," in *Taking Liberties: Problems of a New Order from the French Revolution to Napoleon*, ed. Howard G. Brown and Judith A. Miller (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002), 110–25.

politics of the Old Regime. I argue that as these *élégantes* reformulated their role under the Directory, they drew on the legacy of aristocratic women's networks at court and in Parisian high society. At the same time, they adapted to the new world they faced in an entrepreneurial fashion, similar to the bourgeois elite that Colin Jones sees as benefiting from the commercial and professional opportunities that the Revolution accelerated.[3] While their choices sometimes exposed them to public scandal, this notoriety did not necessarily mean exclusion from elite society. The deployment of Old Regime skills refashioned for the new context of the late Revolution allowed these women not only to survive, but to flourish.[4]

This essay considers the experience of four women who survived the Terror to achieve a kind of celebrity status under the Directory: Thérésia Cabarrus (1773–1835), better known as Madame Tallien; Marie-Josèphe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, the future Joséphine Bonaparte (1763–1814); Juliette Récamier, née Bernard (1777–1849); and the actress Anne-Françoise-Élisabeth Lange (1772–1816). All four were very young when Revolution broke out in 1789 but made use of the skills and networks elite women honed under the Old Regime to survive the Terror, and then, in its aftermath, to solidify their connections to men at the center of political power and to make a name for themselves. However, they also took advantage of the celebrity status beauty and fashion made possible under the new regime and helped shape the new society that emerged.[5] The Directory was, according to Susanne Hillman, a "fleeting historical moment in which women . . . were able to assert their individuality and to create a 'star persona' that resonated with the urban public."[6] Beauty and erotic appeal played a role in their stories as well. In a world that placed a premium on both the physical appearance of women and their ability to please, all four excelled. Beauty was social capital and a path to public recognition, especially as fashion and appearance became increasingly important on the Parisian social scene.[7]

Surviving the Terror

The beautiful Thérésia Cabarrus, the most celebrated female survivor of the Terror's notorious prisons,[8] is also associated with the fall of Maximilien Robespierre and his closest colleagues. The future Madame Tallien used her romantic connection to *représentant en mission* in Bordeaux, Jean-Lambert Tallien, to help aristocrats in danger of execution flee France via that port city, beginning in the fall of 1793. As rumors about their relationship reached the capital, the government recalled Tallien to Paris in February 1794 and imprisoned Thérésia in late May

[3] Colin Jones, "Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change," in *Rewriting the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69–118.
[4] This is a point that Anne Higonnet emphasizes as well in her recent book, *Liberty, Equality, Fashion: The Women Who Styled the French Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2024), 89.
[5] In *Liberty, Equality, Fashion*, Higonnet sees the fashion revolution that Tallien, Bonaparte, and Récamier led as key to their celebrity under the Directory and beyond.
[6] Susanne Hillman, "Empty-handed Beauty: Juliette Récamier as Pseudo-event," *Celebrity Studies* (2015): 2, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19392397.2015.1076343.
[7] On this milieu, see Christine Adams, "'Venus of the Capitol': Madame Tallien and the Politics of Beauty under the Directory," *French Historical Studies* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 599–629.
[8] On the many accounts of her life, see Maïté Bouyssy, "Thérésia Cabarrus, de l'instruction des filles et de la Révolution," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 344 (April-June 2006): 4–5, https://journals.openedition.org/ahrf/6153.

(Fig.1).[9] Popular legend credited Thérésia with inspiring Tallien to join in a plot with other *conventionnels* worried that Robespierre planned to turn against them. Tallien's dramatic speech to the National Convention on 9 Thermidor helped send Robespierre and his closest associates to the guillotine the next day – saving his own life as well as that of Thérésia.[10] When Thérésia was released from prison on 12 Thermidor, Parisians reportedly cheered both her and her lover for their role in ending the Terror.[11]

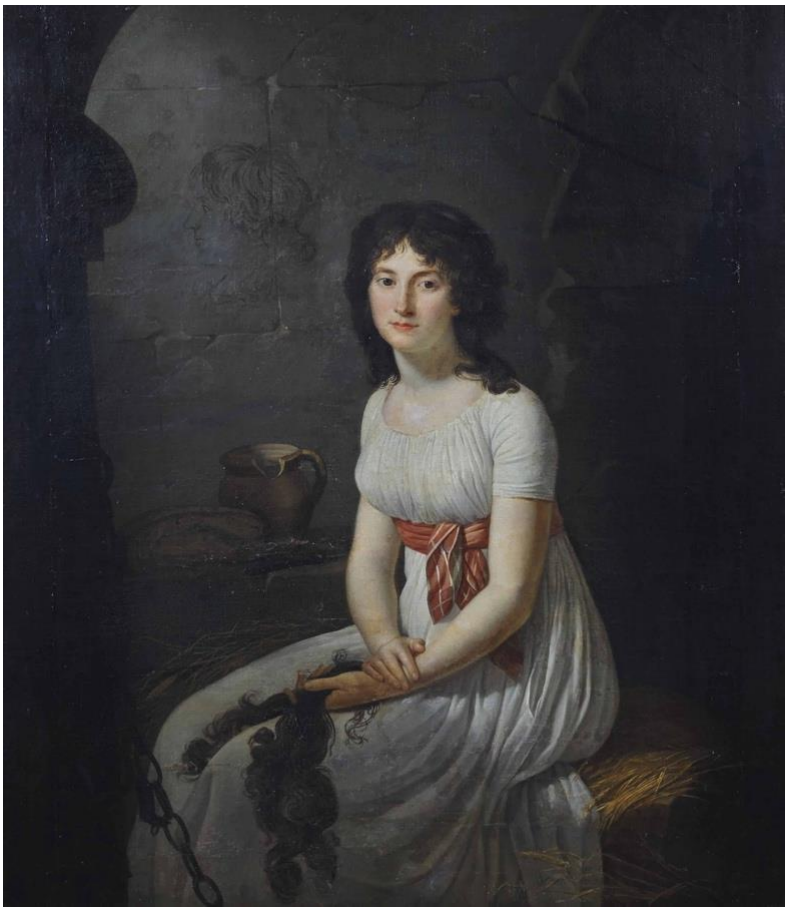

Fig.1. Jean-Louis Laneuville, *La Citoyenne Tallien (1773-1835) dans un cachot à la Force, ayant dans les mains ses cheveux qui viennent d'être coupés*, 1796. Oil on canvas. Private collection. Rights: Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

[9] Albert Soboul, *Portraits de Révolutionnaires* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1986), 301–2; Françoise Kermina, *Madame Tallien, 1773–1835* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), 100–5.
[10] For a contemporary, although romanticized, account, see Alexandre-Joseph-Pierre Ségur, *Women, their Condition and Influence in Society*, 3 vols. (London: C. Whittingham, for T.N. Longman, and O. Rees, 1803), 3: 119–26. It was originally published as *Les Femmes: leur condition et leur influence dans l'ordre social chez différents peuples anciens et modernes* (Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1803). On the dramatic events of 9–10 Thermidor, see Colin Jones, *The Fall of Robespierre: 24 Hours in Revolutionary Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), esp. 191–95.
[11] Étienne-Denis Pasquier, *Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier*, ed. Edme-Armand-Gaston d'Audiffret-Pasquier, 6 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1893–95), 1: 113–14.

While sharing little with Thérésia Cabarrus other than a renowned beauty and a family background in banking and finance,[12] Jeanne-Françoise-Julie-Adélaïde Bernard, better known as Juliette Récamier, could also count herself fortunate to survive the Year II. Her father, *receveur des finances* Jean Bernard, was at risk as the National Convention vilified men involved in Old Regime financial networks. This threat appears to be why the very young Juliette married the banker Jacques-Rose Récamier, who could offer protection if her parents were arrested and would leave his fortune to her if he himself went to the scaffold.[13] All avoided prison and survived the Terror; Juliette achieved celebrity in the years that followed.

Other women who emerged on the social and political scene, like Thérésia, also spent time in prison during the Terror – a sign of righteousness post-Thermidor. They too employed their social and political networks to survive, although few demonstrated her daring. Thérésia's close friend Rose [Joséphine], whose estranged husband Alexandre de Beauharnais went to the guillotine shortly before the events of 9–10 Thermidor, sought comfort from other aristocratic friends and rumored lovers (including future war minister General Lazare Hoche) to survive the Carmes prison and was released on 6 August, a little over a week after the National Convention's revolt against Robespierre – possibly as a result of her earlier friendship with Jean-Lambert Tallien.[14]

A young woman from a very different social milieu imprisoned during the Terror was the celebrated actress, Anne-Françoise-Élisabeth Lange. The luminous Mademoiselle Lange began her acting career at the Théâtre Montansier at the age of fifteen, shortly thereafter joining the Théâtre Français.[15] By 1790, the choice of a theater company and performances became politicized, making Lange's decision to ally herself with the monarchy-friendly Comédie-Française players at the Théâtre du Faubourg Saint-Germain potentially fraught as was the daring portrait she posed for in 1793.[16] After appearing in a play with royalist overtones, she was imprisoned at Sainte-Pélagie with other members of her troupe. She managed to arrange for a less onerous confinement at the pension Belhomme, but in the wake of another denunciation, she was returned to prison. She was freed after 9 Thermidor and newspapers reported on her theater successes again by 1795.[17]

Thriving under the Directory

While surely all four women were grateful to escape the Terror with their lives, in its aftermath, they wanted more than just to survive. They positioned themselves at the center of the post-Thermidor social whirl, ready to enjoy the pleasures that Parisian society had to offer. This positioning involved the cultivation of social and political skills elite women deployed prior to

[12] Thérésia's father, François Cabarrus, was a wealthy financier of Spanish descent.
[13] See Marc Fumaroli, "La 'Dame blanche' de Lyon," in *Juliette Récamier: Muse et mécène*, ed. Stéphane Paccoud, Catalogue d'exposition, Musée des Beaux-arts de Lyon (Paris: HAZAN, 2009), 16–23.
[14] Reportedly, they met through a mutual friend, Madame Hosten, at Croissy. *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance, 1782–1814*, ed. Bernard Chevallier, Maurice Catinat, and Christophe Pincemaille (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1996), letter #17, FN (21–22).
[15] Charles Vogel, "Chronique Théâtrale: La 'Favorite' de Barras," *Les Spectacles*, 15 August 1924, 3.
[16] The portrait, by Jean-François Gilles Colson, was exhibited at the Salon of 1793. Amy Freund, *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 112–15.
[17] See for example, 14 and 19 August 1795 in *Le Messager du soir ou Gazette Générale de l'Europe*.

the Revolution in combination with a clear-eyed understanding of the new regime. Despite the Directory's republican politics that denied women (as well as many men) the right to vote, they could influence the new society and polity in ways similar to female courtiers under the Old Regime. At the same time, the new social and cultural configuration emphasizing pleasure, social activities, and the consumption of luxury goods after so many years of crisis and sacrifice[18] allowed women the possibility of achieving celebrity status thanks to their beauty and style alone. In the Terror's aftermath, fashion once again drew the public's attention, sometimes to the consternation of censorious male politicians.[19] While these young women employed a different mix of strategies and skills, all managed to flourish under the Directory's continued conditions of upheaval and change – and beyond.

Networks, Fashion, and Celebrity

The overlapping political and social networking of the *élégantes* mirrors that of elite women in the years before the Revolution. Post-Thermidor, women continued to rely on their ties to powerful men – even Thérésia, famous as "Notre Dame de Bon Secours," the heroine who had helped targeted aristocrats escape from Bordeaux during the Terror. Pregnant with their daughter, Rose Thermidor, she married Tallien in late 1794, linking her fortunes to a man whose political ascendancy seemed assured during the chaotic months after Robespierre's fall.[20] In addition, her father, François Cabarrus, a Spanish financier of Basque origins, connected her with diplomatic and financial networks.[21] As Tallien's frequent shifts in politics and alliances undermined his popularity,[22] Thérésia cultivated her relationship with Director Paul Barras, a former aristocrat and one of France's most influential politicians, assumed to be her lover.[23] The events that Barras hosted at the Luxembourg Palace, seat of the new government, were a gathering place for the beautiful and the politically connected, as the writer Victorine de Chastenay described in her memoirs.[24] Madame Tallien, she noted, "came to Barras's every day,"[25] along with the regime's most prominent politicians.

Thérésia's political influence was enhanced by her domination of the social and fashion scene along with other young *élégantes*. These women hosted salons, danced at the Tivoli Gardens, attended elaborate balls and concerts, and strolled the Paris boulevards, replacing the Old Regime's female courtiers as arbiters of fashion as newspaper articles on *modes* and fashion journals such as the *Journal des dames et des modes* make clear. Beauty and fashion leadership

[18] Spang, "The Frivolous French," 113–14.
[19] Politician and journalist Pierre Roederer, in particular, warned against the dangers associated with women's domination of the world of fashion. See his "De l'Imitation et de l'Habitude," *Journal d'économie publique, de morale et de politique*, Vol. 2, No. 17, 20 Pluviôse Year 5 (8 February 1797), 349–56.
[20] Mette Harder, "Reacting to Revolution – the Political Career(s) of J.-L. Tallien," in *Experiencing the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013), 87–112, here 99.
[21] Kermina, *Madame Tallien*, 173. Accusations of financial skullduggery would become part of Thérésia's "black legend." For an example of this, see R. McNair Wilson, *The Gipsy-Queen of Paris, Being the Story of Madame Tallien by whom Robespierre Fell* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1934), esp. chap 9.
[22] Harder, "Reacting to Revolution," 103–5.
[23] As he suggests in his memoirs. Paul Barras, *Memoirs of Barras, member of the Directorate*, ed. George Duruy, trans. C.E. Roche, 4 vols. (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1895), 2: 61.
[24] Victorine de Chastenay, *Mémoires de Mme de Chastenay, 1771–1815*, ed. Alphonse Roserot, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1896–97), 1:358–59.
[25] *Mémoires de Mme de Chastenay*, 1: 362.

could pave the way for a celebrity based on physical appearance, charm, and visibility at Parisian sites of sociability that supplanted those of the Old Regime. This celebrity could open doors and foster useful connections.[26] Thérésia's impact on the world of fashion, enhanced by her beauty, was unparalleled. In her memoirs, the Duchesse d'Abrantès wrote: "Madame Tallien was extremely elegant. She gave, she imposed fashions, and it was unfortunate, because often an adornment that suited her ravishing face was disgraceful on someone else . . . ."[27]

Joséphine, the widow Beauharnais, also deployed her beauty and charm as well as her keen sense of fashion to survive after her release from prison. Like many young widows who lost their husbands during the Revolution, she was in a precarious financial position. With two children and a taste for elegance and comfort, she was notoriously low on funds, and relied on her networks to get by. Her neighbor, the future chancellor Étienne Pasquier, noted that, despite her poverty, she enjoyed abundant and varied cuisine at a time of food scarcity in Paris.[28] Its source was evident; once a week, Joséphine welcomed the powerful director Barras to her home "with the large group that trailed in his wake."[29] While Joséphine's correspondence with Barras attests to their warm friendship post-Thermidor and under the Directory, he eventually turned on her, his memoirs suggesting that he encouraged Napoleon and Joséphine to marry, in part to rid himself of Joséphine's importuning.[30]

Ultimately, Joséphine's decision to link her fate with Napoleon meant that she would achieve heights of power and fame surpassing those of her *élégante* friends. Her marriage to the up-and-coming general increased her cachet considerably. According to the *Courrier républicain* in November 1796, "It seems that Madame Buonaparte plays a much different role as the wife of the general of that name than she did when she was just Madame de Beauharnais. No princess has ever made as much commotion as she has in Italy."[31] By 1798, Joséphine was taking center stage at festivities in honor of her and her husband.[32] While Napoleon's fame rapidly surpassed that of his wife, she remained an asset in his rise to power. In addition to his devotion to her, her connection to France's former nobility was a powerful draw, while her gracious personality created good will (Fig.2).[33]

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[26] See Laura Auricchio, "Mme Récamier et les femmes de la haute société au temps du Directoire et du Consulat," in *Juliette Récamier: Muse et mécène*, 100.

[27] Laure Junot, duchesse Abrantès, *Histoire des salons de Paris, tableaux et portraits du grand monde sous Louis XVI, le Directoire, le Consulat et l'Empire, la Restauration et le règne de Louis-Philippe Ier*, 6 vols. (Paris: Chez Ladvocat, 1838), 3: 139.

[28] Pasquier, *Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier*, 1:418.

[29] Pasquier, *Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier*, 1:418.

[30] Barras, *Memoirs of Barras,* 2: 65–69.

[31] *Courrier républicain* du 26 brumaire (November 1796), quoted in François-Alphonse Aulard, *Paris pendant la réaction thermidorienne et sous le Directoire: recueil de documents pour l'histoire de l'esprit public à Paris*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1898–1902), 3: 578.

[32] *Le Publiciste* du 17 nivôse An 6 (5 January 1798), quoted in Aulard, *Paris pendant la réaction thermidorienne et sous le Directoire,* 4: 521.

[33] Although the duchesse d'Abrantès suggested that Napoleon had an exaggerated sense of his wife's status under the Old Regime. Abrantès, *Histoire des salons de Paris,* 5:5–7.

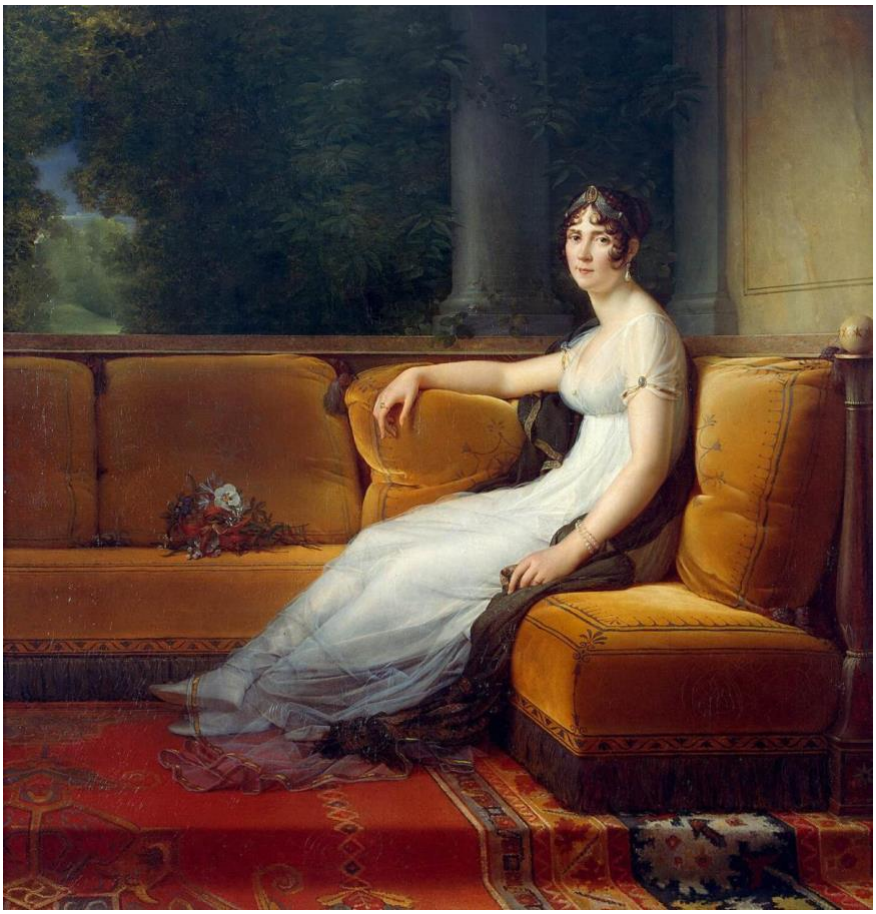

Fig.2. François Gérard, *Portrait of Joséphine de Beauharnais*, 1801. Oil on canvas. Hermitage Museum, ГЭ-5674. Rights: Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Mlle Lange garnered frequent mention in the newspapers for both her theatrical performances and her appearances at social events in the early years of the Directory as she resumed the career and activities that time in prison had interrupted. While actresses in the Old Regime had not mingled with aristocrats except in limited ways, Mlle Lange moved in the same social spaces as many other elite women after Thermidor, her beauty and style making a splash. When the Ottoman ambassador paid a visit in the summer of 1797, the Turkish-inflected apparel of many women drew praise, but the *Courrier des spectacles* noted that "Mlle Lange was perhaps the only one dressed in the French way, with decency, elegance and richness."[34] The crowds who turned out for the third night of the annual festivities at Longchamps saw Lange and her friends from the theater on parade along with other members of Parisian high society.[35]

[34] *Courrier des spectacles*, 12 Thermidor An V (30 July 1797), 2.
[35] *Le Miroir*, 29 Germinal An V (18 April 1797), 3.

While the popular nineteenth-century operetta by Charles Lecocq, *La Fille de Madame Angot*, referred to Mlle Lange as a "favorite" of Barras, no contemporary evidence suggests this; she did, however, attend his soirées at the Luxembourg palace,[36] even as her scandalous custody suit with the Hamburg businessman Hoppé gripped the public's attention in late 1796 and early 1797.[37] She also hosted her own social events; the influential politician Talleyrand regularly attended her gatherings, and reportedly introduced her to Michel-Jean Simons, a wealthy Belgian army supplier and banker.[38] Lange left the theater and married Simons in late 1797, but remained closely linked with men deeply involved in the politics of the French republic. Scandal continued to dog her. In 1799, the artist Anne-Louis Girodet, in a fit of pique directed at Lange (who disliked his rendering of her as Venus), painted her nude as Danaë under a shower of gold, with her husband Simons a turkey in the corner[39] (Fig.3).

[36] Vogel, "La 'Favorite' de Barras," 4.
[37] Newspapers such as *Le Messager du soir*, *Le Miroir*, and *Le Censeur des Journaux* extensively covered the trial, in which Lange and her former lover fought for custody of their daughter Palmyre, in December 1796 and January 1797.
[38] Claude Collard, "La famille Simons, de la berline du Premier Consul dite 'de Bruxelle' à Mademoiselle Lange," *Napoleonica. La Revue*, 1, no. 33 (2019): 33–50, https://www.cairn.info/revue-Napoleonica-la-revue-2019-1-page-33.htm?contenu=article.
[39] For this oft-repeated story, see Arsène Houssaye, *Princesses de comédie et déesses d'opéra: Portraits, camées, profils, silhouettes* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1860), 362–63.

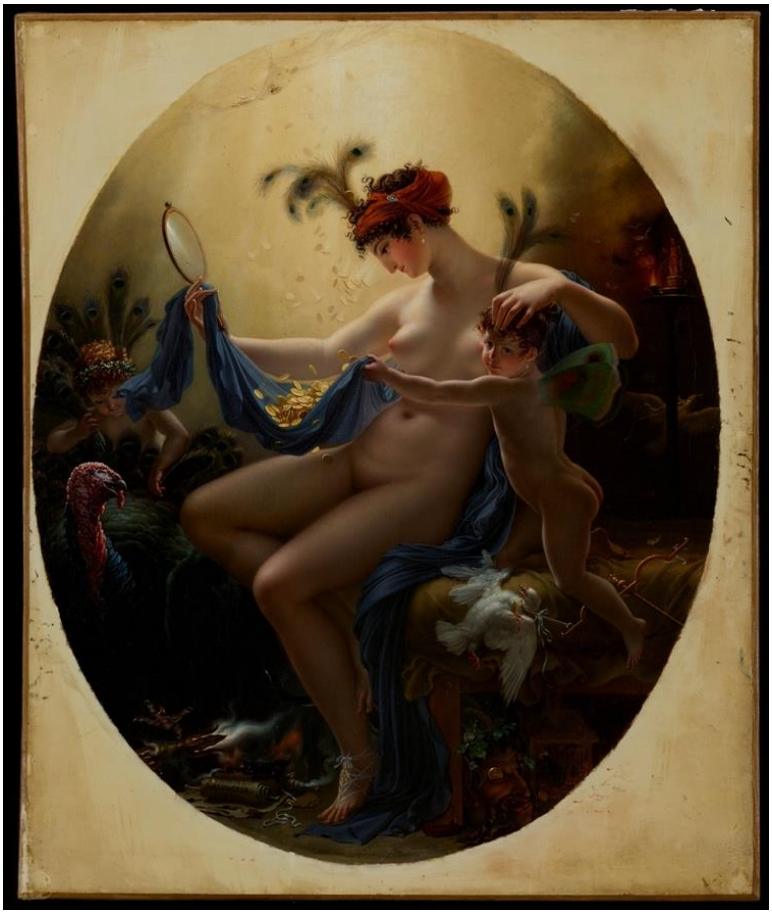

Fig.3. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson, *Portrait of Mademoiselle Lange as Danaë*, 1799. Minneapolis Institute of Art. Rights: Public Domain.

By 1797, the public was also taking notice of Juliette Récamier, associating her with the other queens of the Directory. From the same Longchamps event that Lange attended, the newspapers reported that "mesdames Récamier and Tallien shimmered in the crowd like soft lights in the middle of the night."[40] Only sixteen years old in 1794, her familial networks had helped her survive the Terror. The wider networks she cultivated allowed her to thrive under the new regime. Récamier emerged on the Parisian social scene a bit more slowly than the others, and, for the most part, escaped the notoriety that followed other *élégantes*. She famously danced with a scarf for her guests, heightening her erotic appeal while guarding her virtuous reputation.[41] One of the earliest newspaper mentions of her, at a Feydeau concert in 1796, already contrasted her with her peers: "Mme Récamier, whose modest simplicity enhanced the prettiest figure in the room."[42] Known for her white dresses, Récamier rapidly became a celebrity figure (Fig.4). Her salon would eventually parallel those of Old Regime luminaries such as Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin and Julie Lespinasse,[43] setting the stage for her role in liberal political and social networks under

[40] *Le Miroir*, 29 Germinal An V (18 April 1797), 3.
[41] On this, see Hillman, "Empty-handed beauty," 13.
[42] *Censeur des Journaux* du 12 nivôse (2 January 1796), quoted in Aulard, *Paris pendant la réaction thermidorienne et sous le Directoire*, 3: 668.
[43] See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

the early Consulate, where she hosted gatherings that included Germaine de Staël, Benjamin Constant, and Generals Jean-Victor Moreau and Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte.

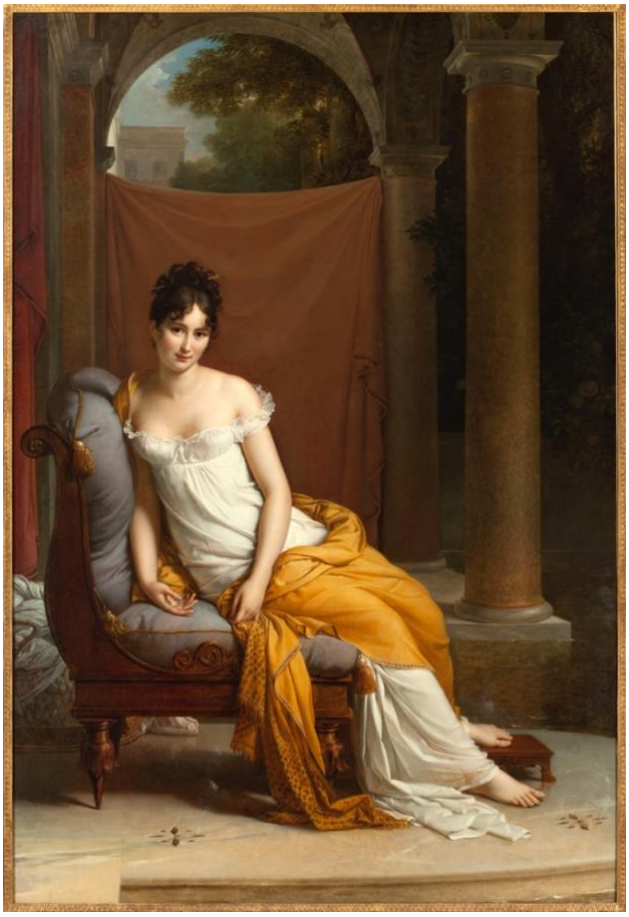

Fig.4. François Gérard, *Portrait de Juliette Récamier, née Bernard*, c. 1802-1805. Oil on canvas. Musée Carnavalet, P1581. Rights: Public Domain.

Patrons and Brokers in the New Society

Political connections to men at the center of power allowed women to serve as political patrons and brokers as they had at court and at salons under the Old Regime.[44] Victorine de Chastenay spoke to Thérésia Tallien's influence on behalf of others in the Directory's political circles, noting that "I have seen her render with as much grace as kindness, and on occasion with persistence and courage, the most important services; M. de la Millière, among others, owed his

[44] See, for example, Olwen Hufton, "Reflections on the role of women in the early modern French court," *The Court Historian* 5, no. 1 (2000): 1–13 and Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 4 (December 1989): 817–41. On the continued importance of salons under the Directory, see Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), chap. 2.

life to her, at a time when perhaps only she could reach Barras and obtain the express order of a reprieve.[45] Barras corroborated Thérésia's role as power broker,[46] and politician Antoine-Claire Thibaudeau suggested that Thérésia "rendered service to the unfortunate of all political persuasions" and was "sought out and courted both for herself and for the political influence of her husband."[47] She even reportedly requested money from the government for a suitable uniform for the young impoverished General Buonaparte before he established himself.[48]

Joséphine's friendship with Barras provided her with opportunities for patronage and networking as well. Her extensive correspondence demonstrates how much she relied on him as a key node in her political network and served as one in his; she often wrote to him, asking him to find positions for friends and acquaintances in the manner of female courtiers in previous decades. Amid the frequent invitations she sent him to dine at her home, she solicited government positions for her friends,[49] or asked Barras to "make himself useful" to individuals she sent his way.[50] Others she petitioned on behalf of her "clients" included the minister of the police,[51] politician Alexandre Rousselin,[52] and Napoleon's brother-in-law Joachim Murat.[53] Her position as wife of France's first consul, then emperor, would make her the most visible of France's elite women. However, the notoriously misogynistic Napoleon may have been less receptive to the soft power of women than Barras and her other male friends under the Directory.

Conclusion: Surviving beyond the Directory

While these four women were among those who wielded influence and dominated the social scene under the Directory, Napoleon's coup d'état on 18 Brumaire Year VIII (9 November 1799) marked a change in their fortunes as it did for others in their political networks. By this point, Lange had retired from the stage and played a less visible social role. For the other three, their relationship with Napoleon shaped their position under the Consulate and Empire and required a change in strategy. Thérésia's celebrity dimmed as the moral tone in French society began to shift. The Napoleonic elite were less willing to associate with a woman tainted by scandal, especially after her open liaison with financier and military supplier Gabriel-Julien Ouvrard and her 1802 divorce from Tallien.[54] In 1805, Napoleon ordered Joséphine to stop all contact with Thérésia, despite her third marriage to the Prince de Chimay. However, the evidence suggests

[45] *Mémoires de Mme de Chastenay*, 1: 363.
[46] *Memoirs of Barras*, 2: 61.
[47] Antoine-Claire Thibaudeau, *Mémoires sur la Convention et le Directoire*. 2nd ed., 2 vols. Vol. I—*Convention*. (Paris: Chez Ponthieu, 1827), 131–32.
[48] Charles Nauroy, *Révolutionnaires* (Paris: Albert Savine, 1891), 62.
[49] For example, letter #36, 4 February 1796, 35; letter #94, 27 July 1798, 72, in *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance.*
[50] Letter #40, April 1796, 37, in *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance*. See also letters #54–56 (48–49) and #84-86 (64–65).
[51] Letter #42, 4 June 1796, followed by three more letters that same month following up on the matter (38–39), in *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance.*
[52] Letter #126, 24 June 1799 (87–88), in *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance*. On Rousselin and his career as well as his close friendship with Joséphine, see Jeff Horn, *The Making of a Terrorist: Alexandre Rousselin and the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), esp. 118–20.
[53] Letter #202, 1802, 76, in *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance*.
[54] Françoise Kermina suggests that by this point, Thérésia was "[r]ejetée par la bonne société," but that foreigners were still happy to attend her salons. *Madame Tallien,* 275.

that Thérésia's final marriage was a successful one, even if her notoriety limited her social possibilities. Juliette Récamier's celebrity grew in the early years of the Consulate, but her close friendship with Napoleon's enemy, Germaine de Staël, resulted in her exile from Paris in 1811. She regained prominence as a *salonnière* under the Restoration. Despite her husband's financial collapse and their separation, her salon at l'Abbaye-aux-Bois in the Faubourg St. Germain was a gathering place for numerous political and cultural celebrities in the first half of the nineteenth century.[55] Joséphine, of course, achieved heights of social supremacy she could never have imagined during the early revolutionary years, when she was crowned as empress in 1804. Five years later, Napoleon set her aside in favor of a new, younger (and royal) wife who could bear him a son, although she retained his friendship and château at Malmaison until her death in 1814.

All four women thrived under the Directory, effectively redeploying Old Regime traditions of networking along with their beauty and charm to find celebrity and influence in a new social and political context. But celebrity and political power are by their very nature fleeting, especially in times of flux and crisis. Both women and men were forced to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances of France's revolutionary decade – and to reconsider over time the meaning of survival.

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H-France Salon
ISSN 2150-4873

[55] Daniel Harkett, "Mediating Private and Public: Juliette Récamier's Salon at l'Abbaye-aux-Bois," in *Women, Femininity and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789–1914*, ed. Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen (Farnham, Surrey/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 47–64, 49.